



IN THE LABYRINTH OF TRANSPARENT KNOWLEDGE

Art as Anthropological Epistemology

Remarks on Vassiliea Stylianidou's environment *PlaceLineLack* (2007) as multimedia counterpoint to Nietzsche's proposition that "Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally is built the same house of Being"¹

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0 Prolegomenon on a personal note

Can a narrative that is fundamentally concerned with the non-functioning of narrative be effectively told? Is there an image for the splitting and shattering of images? Can one relate to something whose principal property is not to relate to something else without misrepresenting it? Can separations that no longer know what it was that was connected be revoked and reconnected to what was formerly connected? The purpose of these rather demanding questions is to make the following question seem more plausible: can a work such as Stylianidou's, which, as multimedia environment, is able to place the inherent relations between spatial installation, video installations and text installation, and hence the internal dialogue of the material, in an immense openness, be described in a closed form, with a leading thought – even with a theory?

From the point of view of systems theory, no problem, one might say, since language operates with different elements than the "system of art", obeys different operative rules and limits. Moreover, an information-processing system does not take information from the environment, but constructs this fully internally. A text about art does not describe art, but the describing itself. Perception cannot be communicated, but

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Graham Parkes, Oxford 2005, p. 190. For the subsequent quotations in the text, see *ibid*.





is only the communication of this. And whether communication is artistic is not decided by art, but once again (in most cases), by communication. Therefore, in terms of systems theory, the question can be answered with a resounding yes.

Also in terms of reception theory, a positive answer is possible, as long as one is convinced that the viewer of art is also – perhaps even actually – the producer of art.² Since, if this is the case, the violence inflicted on the open artwork by a closed description, a closed interpretation, a translation is reduced by the multiplicity of viewers who, in their (re)constructions of the artwork, prolong the openness, the lack of a unifying principle, the fragmentation and incompleteness. Corresponding to the linguistic maxim that much of what language does and is capable of emerges not in and through itself, but in its use, the artwork – and not merely in terms of a Romantically-tinged reception aesthetics – only becomes such in the process of being seen, viewed and appropriated by the receiver.

To sum up, a description of a dance need not dance itself; a work, above all an artwork, only becomes such in and through the observer. And thus, the “art” of writing about *art* is either an “art”, entirely divorced from what is being described, or the “actual” production of *art*.

These alternatives governing the relation between art(work) and description *are not followed in this text*. Why?

Because, at first glance – or rather, in the “viewer’s” first immersive encounter – *PlaceLineLack* performs a seemingly impossible rejection of linguistic, aesthetic and artistic modes of “putting-in-relation”, one that seems to pull out all the stops. With extreme attentiveness, it severs the links between word and thing, meaning and sign, metaphor and literalness, designated and designator, white cube and real life. And this is done without a gesture of seeking to undermine boundaries, of intentionally breaking

² Hans Ulrich Reck, “Der Betrachter als Produzent? Zur Kunst der Rezeption im Zeitalter technischer Medien”, in: *Das Bild zeigt das Bild selber als Abwesendes. Zu den Spannungen zwischen Kunst, Medien und visueller Kultur*, Vienna and New York 2007, pp. 173-186.





with conventions, without the claim of inventing a constellation that advances into supposedly unknown territories. Stylianidou is concerned with movements that should allow something to flash up between the references, classifications and meanings held in place by signs, history and language that we call “play” (in the sense of: something *has* play). Play, but not (or not yet) a space of play – Stylianidou speaks of “playces”. Because the place in which all this is staged is no longer clearly determined by the context of the exhibition, the gallery, the “warning: art” design, the clear publication format (such as, now, the “art catalogue”) as art, artist, “making-art” etc. Thus, for something to be given a certain play, the frame, the space must also be created – detached from the hardened, congested, stiff routines and abstractions of the putting-into-relation of words and things, sensations and cognitions, as well as subjects and objects.

If it is correct that every modern person is simultaneously forced to become a researching anthropologist, then how much more is this the case for those that social semantics allocates the “space of art”, a space that could never be certain of its place (at least for existential artists)? A space, incidentally, that, next to and near to the space of science, always had to order the sites of knowledge as well as to safeguard everything that is not known, everything that is not learnt while we learn and know more and more.

Stylianidou’s work practices, “is” anthropology. The questions it raises touch on living, being-with-world, cohabitation, speech and thought, becoming-gestalt (“Life could be a gestalt in time”). At the same time, it practices and is epistemology. The questions it raises touch on the bases for understanding as such, cognition, interpretation and designation as such. Stylianidou has at her back the invention of man by science since the mid-eighteenth century (Foucault) – and the knowledge of diverse dispositifs carried out “on man”, and tested in a broad range of mostly brutal anthro-technologies. At the end of the twentieth century at the latest, these experiments in dispositifs on man acquired a palimpsestic “scarification” – and have subsequently been examined by the cultural and social sciences (writing culture, and increasingly techno-aesthetic visual culture, in the





broadest sense). What seems to remain – following the postmodern phase of sampling – are “people” that, with their diverse historico-social mantles (*animal rationale*, symbolic order, communication), “hang” like loose threads in the historical vacuum. This is true of many people as individuals as well as for the controlling corset of collective systems – a loose differentiation in social systems organised by money, law and communication whose exclusion rate grows yearly.

It seems clear that the starting point for *PlaceLineLack* is this “end-modernity” – and that, in this space, *PlaceLineLack* attempts to detect epistemological resources (Davor Löffler) as well as the human resource called epistemology. This is what makes this work so seductively difficult! Difficult because Stylianidou extends the existential dimensions of life, being and becoming into an epistemological triangle without continuing to play games of counter-intuition and counter-facticity – thus enabling her to do without the usual forms of displacement, derangement, inversion, the staging of remote understanding, “de-familiarisation” etc. What she shows is life, becoming, being (and not: faith, love, hope; living, activity, ontology; the true, the good and the beautiful), which can only be shown or read, now, in this moment, and which is no longer obscured by centuries-old adjustments and variations, no longer obscured by visions of the future, no longer obscured by meaning and sense. The present, actuality, the so-called most recent state of a system, of a person, an artwork, an artefact becomes an epistemological *tabula rasa*, a present that has stripped off (but not lost) its past, and now opens the view to all available, manufactured, developed human artificiality, which no longer has a name, a definition, is no longer even able to say what name, definition and meaning mean.³

³ This state, in which the actual state is entirely filled with what has past, without being able to be explained and understood one iota is presented in its most comic literary form in Douglas Adams’ *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* in a scene in which a nuclear bomb is transformed into a whale. Finding itself suddenly in the depths of the universe, the whale attempts, in the first moments of existence, to discover who and what it is – probing, testing, thinking, speaking. Whereupon, it dies.





As multimedia, multi-sensual work, *PlaceLineLack*, on the one hand, takes leave of a systems-theoretical media theory according to which each medium captures specifically the world, but, at the same time, knows to secure everything related to the world and hence universal world data; on the other hand, it distances itself from the theory of composition according to which something like a division of labour of the different and differently used media, by being placed in the correct arrangement, produces more than the sum of its parts. These parentheses, these ordering schemata, these reductive formula are suspended by Stylianidou: the break between “material” (object) and analysis (subject), between definition and that to be defined, between saying and declaring is irreversible. *World in its current complexity and excessiveness is rediscovered in the extreme distance from the material of the theoretical product of the material analysis.* Certainty as to whether the product of analysis consists of material (generally: signified, body, consciousness) becomes increasingly difficult.

– This range points to a space in the horizon opened by *PlaceLineLack*. Let us go a step further.

1 Being present as question about the where: outside without inside, inside without outside?

What, in the opening quotation Nietzsche has the animals of the convalescent Zarathustra say – “Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally is built the same house of Being” – has been largely subsumed, in its reception history, into Martin Heidegger’s fusion of house, being and language⁴: language is the house of being, a place in which man abides; the thinkers and poets are the guardians of this abode; their guardianship is the bringing about of the manifestness of being insofar as this is brought

⁴ Cf. Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1950-1959), in: GA, vol. 12, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, Frankfurt am Main 1985, especially: “Das Wesen der Sprache” (1957).





to speech through their talk and thus preserved in language – and other more or less helpful observations.

House, in this context, is clearly more than the concrete, comfortable or inhospitable *dwelling*. And more, even, than the already materialist functionalisation or concentration of the concrete building in the conceptual complex called *household* (economy). Rather, the focus on house touches on the fundamental act/process in the history of mankind of *in-dwelling*, *oikeiôsis*, in the entirely new dimension of the “world” (as a counter-dimension to “earth”). The “two-legged featherless animal” (Plato) fallen from creation called man is and has nature, is life and has this to carry out, finds himself in a space, on earth – though without an allocated place that is at hand, without being indicated “his place”, without an established life-world. He is forced, coming from “outside” to become involved in something that still does not exist (the space of possibility called “world” in which *nomos*, *ethos* and *aisthesis* become necessary additions to *physis*). Thus, the ancient concept of in-dwelling stands for man’s transformation from biological creature to “moral rational being” and therefore for a slow process of installing oneself and establishing oneself in a “new” form of Dasein called the-world-as-language (of reason), which philosophy long interpreted as what was most proper to man – since: “man shows himself as the entity which talks”.⁵ Moreover, according to Heidegger: “Dasein has language”.⁶ And Socrates asserts further: “Speak, that I may know thee”.⁷

It is not surprising that in the human-sciences triangle “life, work, language”, the latter term was long considered as the insurance office of “being”, while life operated as the claims counter for “becoming”, and work for “having”. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, despite huge attacks from historical materialism and despite the formal-

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford 2005, p. 208.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Quoted in: Balthasar Gracián, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, trans. by Joseph Jacobs Charleston 2008, p. 116





pragmatic picking-over of the consciousness- and existence-philosophical corpus of language, “language” still holds for many dealing with survival the largest share when it is a matter of securing one’s existence, that is to say, of casting doubt on one’s existence in the symbolic order (producing evidence of existence through doubt).

It seems appropriate, however, to change the approach of this first tentative examination of Stylianidou’s work, and to call again on Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* in order to make certain distinctions regarding Stylianidou’s inner/outer space-time-language installation.

After Zarathustra had lain seven days like a corpse in his cave and had finally raised himself on his pallet, “his animals believed that the time had come to talk to him” (p. 189). And they did this with mostly encouraging words. Zarathustra quickly responds:

“ – O my animals” replied Zarathustra, “do chatter on thus and let me listen to you! It is so refreshing to hear you chatter: where there is chatter, there the world lies for me like a garden./ How lovely it is that there are words and tones: are words and tones not rainbows and seeming-bridges between what is eternally separated?/ [...] For me – how could there be an outside-me? There is no outside! But with all tones we forget that; How lovely it is that we forget!/ Are things not furnished with names and tones so that human beings might refresh themselves with things? It is a beautiful foolery, this speaking: *with it human beings can dance over all things*” (p. 189f.; italics B.T.).

The animals respond enthusiastically to this last sentence:

– “O Zarathustra,” said his animals in reply, “for those that think as we do *all things are already dancing*; they come and shake hands and laugh and flee – and come back again./ [...] Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally is built the same house of





Being. Everything separates, everything greets itself again, eternally true to itself remains the ring of Being” (p. 190; italics B.T.).

PlaceLineLack is a neither additive nor organic complex of the intervention in, the contradiction of, the counterpoint to this same “house of Being”, a counterpoint to the hubris that man finds his “home” *over* the things, in the meta of the gaze, of analysis, of reflection, as well as the counterpoint to the romantic yearning that the dancing things could lose their object status and find their place as living entities without injuries in the house of being. In *PlaceLineLack*, Stylianidou exposes this counterpoint in a threefold, even fourfold manner of allusion/mise-en-scène:

- as being-concretion (the house model skeleton; “being-house”),
- as being-sociality (video loop of the ice-cream-eating family; “being-in-the-house”),
- as being-language (the script; “being-by-the-house”),
- as well as an orthogonal counterpoint of this house in the form of “not-yet-being”, or better, “becoming-being” (video loop of the amorphous, [dancing] white mass desperately attempting to morph).

This last intervention may counter, however minimally, the recollection that Zarathustra’s animals describe as the experience of the dancing things – since the movements of this “amorphous mass” are closer to a struggle than a dance.

In short, *PlaceLineLack* shows how the man, who for Zarathustra dances over all things, is someone who has arranged “his life” in the modes of being-*over*(bearing), being-“meta”(phoric) or being-“para”(dox) to such an extent that he no longer comes *to* the things, no longer dwells *in* the things, no longer speaks *for* the things:

- the house is present, but it cannot be entered;
- the ice-cream-eating group (i.e., a group involved in a luxuriating inner-environment) is present, but only to be observed from outside, from the back, from behind the heads of





the family members clearly representing an ingroup, without the chance to enter, to be part, without the offer of participation;

- Language and text are well presented (reading lamps!), but the signifiers no longer refer to what is outside; they concern themselves. What does this mean?

“[T]he words are deadly bored” (p. 5) – they concern their own conditions of making possible – “immense violence [...] before the articulation” (ibid.) – they concern their own conditions of making impossible – “the language is finally being abused” (p. 8) – they concern their distant connection to understanding – “when language tries to be understandable it betrays itself” (p. 11) – in short, they create something like “a text without space” (p. 15), a text to be seen, to be heard, to be read, but which is no longer exhausted in the act of being read, in the disclosure of semantics and meaning that produces a sound, tones, that attempts to withdraw from strict meanings and interpretations, that listens to itself (“the words listen to themselves”, p. 30), that remains shut up in itself in an effort to no longer convey information but to “perform” the conveyance itself as information – inaccessible, but to be sensed, to be felt, to be dreamt in its inaccessibility (“the text is not made to occupy”, p. 16).⁸ Stylianidou’s text is something like a cure or an inflammation – but never delirium, never expression. After the period of inflammation, it eventually returns to its function within the symbolic order (“the text has calmed down”, p. 28), namely, to describe something that does not itself lie in the materiality of the inscription.

⁸ “Speaking and writing are fundamentally very peculiar things; real conversation is a mere play of words: One can only be amazed at the ridiculous error of those who think they speak for the sake of the things said. Precisely that defining characteristic of language that it is merely concerned with itself, no one knows. That is why it is such a wonderful secret, that when one speaks merely to speak, he says the most wonderful, most original truths. But when one intends to speak about something specific, then capricious language makes him say the most ridiculous and contradictory stuff” (Novalis, *Werke*, ed. by Gerhard Schulz, Munich 2001, p. 426).





This “without space” of the text does not, however, mean an opaque space of text that has abandoned the possibility of a space of play, not a vacuum, not a surface. Instead, the “without” implies a space as a space of meaning, of encoding, as symbolic space entirely structured by syntax, grammar and semantics. Text *without* allocated places and sites; space that has a place for everything, but no longer demands that everything is in its place, and has its place.⁹

Such a form of “text without space” has a very associative relation to the space that, in psychoanalytic metapsychology, is commonly called the unconscious. It is not, first of all, a matter of sense, meaning, symbolic order, but primarily of grasping the space of the unconscious as being structured like language/text or as language/text (Freud/Lacan). The texture of a space mostly has a sense, mostly makes sense, mostly has a meaning – however, meaning and sense are not logically, necessarily to be derived from the simple availability of texture, just as individual signs, images, words etc. should not be considered primarily according to the distinction of whether or not they can be inscribed into the symbolic order.¹⁰

Hence, Stylianidou’s “text without space” does not deal with a no man’s land, it is not about evacuation or scorched earth, but about the chance to re-place, re-write, re-build, re-construct: “In the installation *PlaceLineLack* I am constructing a space / a journey of plot.” This statement relates to the space of the installation, but might equally relate to

⁹ One could also speak of semi-heterotopias, understood as the emergence of space in the medium of non-situated places.

¹⁰ Entirely in the sense of Richard Rorty. According to Rorty, if we abandon the attempt to fill the idea of a non-human language with meaning, then we need not be tempted to mix up the statement that the world can indeed be the cause of the fact that we rightly hold a sentence to be true and coherent and meaningful with the assertion that the world naturally divides itself up into sentence-shaped pieces called facts, and into sense and meaning. – Thus, Stylianidou is interested in how text-space and the space of the text is fully able to have meaning, but the meaning of the text is not exhausted in its interpretation and by being translated into meanings. This direction follows a meta-perspective, an epistemic curiosity that enquires into what it means when something means something, what is the ontic status of description, what we understand under understanding. In psychoanalytical terms, one could speak of a game with the “real” – from the perspective of the imaginary and the symbolic.





the space of the text. Text and space – in each case responsible for entirely different distinctions between medium and form – enter into a fundamental synonymy, are the entry points of a circle that is closed in itself and to be discussed in more detail, for which it makes no difference whether one attempts to enter the context (space) via the text, or to understand the text via the context (space). Since, whether one is in a place which provides no certainty as to the space in which it is to be “located” (place without space), or whether one reads a sentence which provides no certainty as to where it can be found in symbolic space, in the linguistic contexture, makes no difference that makes a difference – hermeneutics meets subtly with hermeticism. Important and fundamental seems to be something else, namely: how a position, a place can be found in spatial and textual space that provides the viewer with entry *and* exit to the dimensions of life, being and becoming. *PlaceLineLack* would thus, put rather simply, be the epistemic exploration of space-language-(text)-gaps, of gaps¹¹ that do not make visible their quality of vacancy, of lack, of absence of positivity, but their quality of bringing about an onto-poiesis that can now only be described as polyvalent, no longer as univalent/distinct – namely, *to enclose/abstain(oneself)* [(sich) zu enthalten]. It is a matter of placelessness and spacelessness as the missing framework for places of residence, spaces of residence that “are” simultaneously entirely unoccupied (free?) and entirely caught in the orbit of nothingness, of lack, of vacancy, of absence.

How can one enclose [enthaltten] oneself in time and in spaces, and how can one endure [aushalten] the not-being-enclosed in time and in spaces? Can the enclosing-oneself be a form of residence when space, language and time, in their inhospitality, no longer provide support [Unterhalt], residence [Aufenthalt], entertainment [Unterhaltung] (interaction) per se?

¹¹ I accept the impurity of interpreting “lack”, not as deficit, but rather in the sense of “gap”.





Vassiliea Stylianidou thus opens up a discourse – generally labelled postmodern – that was interested in the consequences of the nihilation of world, space and history, and hence insisted on time and on a temporary identity as foci. The initial assumption at the time was that for many contemporaries, due to the disappearance of all the tools suitable for the production of abstinence from the “here-and-now”, for the rendering non-simultaneous of time, only time could remain as a form of residence even though the whole psychic, conceptual and interactionist setting of these contemporaries was oriented to Dasein, to being at home, to coming home (as a shield against invasiveness), to: self-encounter.¹² To abide in time, however, would necessarily require being able to enclose oneself: to enclose oneself in something that one no longer is, as well as to be able to abstain oneself from something that one is.¹³ Something, time, encloses [enthaltten] me when I abstain [enthaltten] from my *self*. The double-edged quality of the enclosing-onself/abstaining-from-onself would demand that time – thus, what encloses me – is no longer to be thought in the same way that self-consciousness tends to consider what is its own, its *self* – namely, as something that (at least) must be able to accompany all my thoughts, and thus as something that, in whatever space, time, doing or leaving creates presence, is always present, here and now, thus places itself precisely where otherwise time tends to show itself: in presence.

What happens – one can thus sum up this postmodernist question – when time is not “thought” as non-singular [eigenlos]?

¹² Self-encounter is used here as a synthetic concept that should smooth away conceptual differences. It encompasses, among other things, ego-identity, self-consciousness, the self. Hence, self-encounter still stands for the pathological procedure of short-circuiting self-consciousness and self-transparency.

¹³ If one wants, one can see here a position for Schelling’s concept of actual freedom as consisting of not-being-able-to-be, of not-being-able-to-express, naturally directed against Hegel’s concept of freedom as necessarily expressing oneself. However, self-abstinence [Sich-Enthalten] like self-restraint [Sich-Zurückhalten] no longer refers to a concept of potentiality which must somehow be preserved from deterioration through realisation.





Stylianidou's *PlaceLineLack* now extends this consideration of singularity/non-singularity [Eigenheit/Eigenlosigkeit]: it is no longer time as something converging towards people that is fundamentally at stake, but also the space, language, community of / created by people – finally even becoming as such. What is described in systems theory in an entirely different sense as the almost excessive differentiation of systems according to their autonomous logic, Stylianidou exposes as transgression of a comprehensive opaqueness of Dasein that condemns individuals to abide outside; an outside that can no longer be described in terms of a philosophy of consciousness as negation (“tarrying with the negative”; Hegel¹⁴), in terms of a philosophy of the subject as subjectivity after the end of the subject (Foucault's the look of/from the exterior; Deleuze's “to live one life, not my life”), finally as an outside that can no longer be described in terms of a logic of distinction as an outside related to an inside.

What can be seen?

¹⁴ “To break up an idea into its ultimate elements means returning upon its moments, which at least do not have the form of the given idea when found, but are the immediate property of the self. Doubtless this analysis only arrives at thoughts which are themselves familiar elements, fixed inert determinations. But what is thus separated, and in a sense is unreal is itself an essential moment [...]. [...] But that an accident as such, when out loose from its containing circumference, – that what is bound and held by something else and actual only by being connected with it, – should obtain an existence all its own, gain freedom and independence on its own account – this is the portentous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of pure ego. Death, as we may call that unreality, is the most terrible thing, and to keep and hold fast what is dead demands the greatest force of all. [...] But the life of the mind is not one that shuns death, and keeps clear of destruction; it endures death and in death maintains its being. It only wins to its truth when it finds itself utterly torn asunder. It is this mighty power not by being a positive, [...] on the contrary, mind is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and dwelling with it. This dwelling beside it is the magic power that converts the negative into being.” (G.W.F. Hegel, *The phenomenology of the Mind*, vol. 1, trans. by J.B. Baillie, London 2002, p. 30f.)





2 Singularity/non-singularity [Eigensinn/Eigenlosigkeit] and observation

In the installation space various and multiple traces of plot are registered and interwoven. The model of the skeleton of a house. Dimensions 400X200X200. If I take the place of the viewer I am aware of a certain difficulty in the discovery of a relation with the model of the house. This is due to the misleading scale and the phenomenally wrong placement of some of its elements. It is closed. Motion around that model is possible. It can become the subject of curiosity and questions. Nevertheless the construction offers a place for the viewer. (Stylianidou)

The house skeleton forming the centre of the installation is closed. It provides a series of views inside, and the steps as structural invitation to enter recall a time in which one could naturally assume an interior, a place of retreat. Now, however, the steps are only ornamental, an accessory without a function; entrance into the house is impossible. What remains is the possibility of *abiding by* the house. The house, symbol and *realis* of man's power to protect himself against the hardships of "nature" is henceforth only something exterior to "nature". One remains in close range to a closed interior – and is tempted, due to the hermetic, impossible interior of the house, to create a new interior in the exterior: language. Stylianidou realises this with the intimate constellation of stool, reading lamp and script ("The allusively enclosed external space acquires the quality of an intimate room") and hence with elements that definitely belong to the *intérieur*. This, however, is no longer sufficient to carry out the function of shelter that a house fulfils. The "house" of language (writing, text) demands more than simply being there, more than the "simple" furnishing with objects. Since it is now only the eyes that make possible the physical entry into the space – the reading of sentences, words, letters. The observer must create points of entry within himself; the reader must find his own way into the text, into the story, into the language. The space of language does not have a door through which one simply enters to be in the space. Language does not even have a space outside the





reader. The reader must create it himself – the space and the objects inside. And this necessity, more than ever to be responsible for whether I find a symbolic/imaginary place in the house of language expresses, conversely, the difficulty that all this only occurs in the real homelessness that is commonly called “the real”. That is the price we have to pay for the chance to “live” in a symbolic and imaginary space. This chance was and is often understood as freedom – in existentialism as the obligatory freedom (to), in German idealism and in Romanticism as the necessary freedom (from), and currently as an almost useless freedom (without relation). Man as animal fallen from nature sets himself up in a language in which he learns to interpret his fallenness from “nature” as emancipation, as emancipation from nature – dialectically, through nature – and rediscovers himself at the end of a period of history that was thousands of years in the making (more or less as an effect of writing) as a being that can no longer be set back into “nature”, who is no longer able to find his place of destination in language, in the symbolic order.

However, the “natural” and symbolic order alone do not satisfy the need-satisfaction-resonance complex of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. There is also an order of social atmosphereality, of social perception, the formation of inside/outside borders through “community”.

Opposite the reading place of the text we can see a big video projection. A family in the garden of a house are eating white ice cream. The camera moves in circles over their heads. We can detect the interruption of movement. The motion insists on the back of the heads not on faces. There is the encircling motion around a closed, organized system of relations. Is it all about the constitution of a group? Is something about to happen? Or has it already happened?

With this video installation of an ice-cream-eating family, Stylianidou raises a further, this time very tricky, epistemological question about man – since this time it is not only the abstraction man, but man as observer, as spectator, that is put into relief in a short circuiting with the installation. In short, man as spectator can never find entry,





become interwoven in what one generally calls community, but which might be better described as a community of the first order.¹⁵ At most, he can make out an interior that cannot be entered, that remorselessly keeps him “outside” for as long as he remains a spectator.

In the description of her work, the artist writes: “I set the question of space [...] as a possibility of involvement and absorption of the viewer.”

The designation “viewer” is well chosen since it allows us to make important distinctions with great clarity in relation to the concept of space and the concepts of being part, the sharing of space, being-with. If “man” no longer finds his place in the existential abode/in-dwelling on earth, he still has access to symbolic/imaginary space. To achieve this, he must become a “reader”, the notable offspring of the “viewer”. At the same time, however, with this cultural technique of observation or this so-called “ocular tyranny”, it is already possible to make out certain limits: there are social systems, social spaces in which and in relation to which one only has a part when one is a part. Participation through observation is impossible. There is no form of involvement. On the contrary, the mere viewing of a cohesive group produces a concise sense of distance and of the outside of one’s own observation. Stylianidou’s arrangement of the video installation in the context of the installation as a whole is revealing: if one looks up from the manuscript pages, one sees the family at a big table – always from outside. The camera always remains behind the backs of the individual members; it shows a social event that only exists for the family members sitting next to or opposite one another. The group circle is the hard, invisible border between inside and outside. As viewers, we are included in the event of not being included; we find ourselves again in not-finding-ourselves; we occupy a viewing space without public space. Or is *PlaceLineLack* the space – perhaps the last accessible space? A

¹⁵ A second-order community – here I follow Richard Rorty – would be a community of eccentrics.





space, that openly makes experienceable that art can be a shelter in a complex way in times of metaphysical, symbolic and social homelessness?

It seems not. Stylianidou rightly avoids overburdening “art” with the tasks of providing sense, space, future for people. While the viewer entering the installation makes no attempt to appropriate the space (*my space*), Stylianidou avoids breaking up into its individual parts the optimistic insight of operational autopoiesis theory that openness touches on closedness. Rather – if a sub-message is required – *PlaceLineLack* pleads indirectly for the provision of an imperative hearing that has already been attempted conceptually by philosophical Romantics: move into the open!

But where is the open, where is the gap that, it is said, only the devil leaves?¹⁶

3 Past becoming, closed having-become-ness [Gewordensein]

The question about the open is asked by *PlaceLineLack* with a last, epistemologically grounded approach to the triangle “life, becoming, being” – namely, with the treatment of becoming. And it is no surprise that the inaccessibility, the opaqueness, the absence of a means of entrance to space as such reaches a climax here in a twofold manner: on the one hand, this video projection is the most peripheral *within* the space of the installation – it is found at the edge of the exhibition space and, unfavourably for the viewer, at ground level¹⁷ – and on the other hand, the perspectival arrangement *in* the video is one that directly suggests an experience of restriction, confinement, imprisonment, constriction. Here Stylianidou accomplishes something impressive: she

¹⁶ Alexander Kluge, *Die Lücke, die der Teufel läßt* [The Gap the Devil Leaves]. *Im Umfeld des neuen Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main 2005, (*The Devil's Blind Spot. Tales from the New Century*, trans. by Martin Chalmers and Michael Hulse, New York 2004).

¹⁷ Without too great a leap, this could perhaps be ranked alongside Deleuze's observation that: “the majority, insofar as it is analytically included in the abstract standard, is never anybody, it is always Nobody – Ulysses – whereas the minority is the becoming of everybody, one's potential becoming.” (Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, New York and London 2004, p. 117.)





shows that even “becoming” itself, the emergence of something, the miracle of living/sensitive matter can no longer be contained in an a priori coordinate system – whether space and time or process and reality; and that it is pure convention, pure confusion, to position this “becoming” as the fundamental space of everything (and therefore also of people) in “nature”, to interpret it as property of “nature”. Something that, as naturalisation, always experiences a boom in periods of depressive descriptions of the socio-cultural world, but which here in the video projection is presented as what it undoubtedly is: a provisional arrest, even a domestication, of the powers of becoming, revealing its stage-like character. It is here that *PlaceLineLack* offers its most fundamental insight: namely that the *physis* (that which arises from itself) preceding all distinctions, acting orthogonally to dualisms and polarities, is itself enlisted into the anthropological powers of distinction, designation and control. But at the same time we also encounter the hopeful message that this domestication and instrumentalisation of “becoming” should be recognised as a patently dilettantish staging, as clear provisionality – and that the last, still well-functioning gap called nature can in no way still be the only anchor point for the miracle of the anthro-po-social becoming to get to grips with the syndrome of a functional life endowed with language.

Finally, after the ruined “dwellings” of the “in-dwelling”, of language and community/society, the last great conceptual magnet has been ruined or has disappeared whose task it was to hide the unanswerability of the experiment “man” with simple and trivial explanatory models.¹⁸

¹⁸ It is to be welcomed that Stylianidou abstains from all theological, religious and metaphysical-authoritarian treatments of her theme, which, in my opinion, are still given their most tolerable form in Thomas Luckmann’s version: “The organism – considered apart, nothing but the isolated pole of a ‘senseless’ subjective process – becomes itself by undertaking the construction of an ‘objective’ and moral universe of meaning. In doing so, it transcends its biological nature. It aligns itself with an elementary layer of meaning corresponding to the concept of religion, if the transcending of the biological nature through the human organism can be described as a religious phenomenon.” (Thomas Luckmann, *Die unsichtbare Religion*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, p. 85f.)





What is to be seen?

In terms of perspective, we see a space that is constructed from three photographs to the left, right and at the back, and from a video projection at the front surrounded by these photographs. It is a kind of passe-partout in the form of an optical machine.

The photographs show a meadow on the left, a detail of wild grassland on the right, trees in front of a lake in the background. These are clearly photos, arranged in perspective like blown-up posters so that their scenery-like character is clearly displayed (for example, the tree/lake photo at the back does not properly close off the scene; it resembles a billboard that is meant to temporarily fill a gap remaining between the meadow on the left and the grass on the right). These photos of idyllic nature form a fixed framework for the video that can be seen at the front. – But here things already become unclear. Is it at the front or is it below? Is it in the middle of the photographic backdrop? In any case, it is enclosed. Enclosed, confined is a process that materialises in/through / in relation to something: an unformed, white “thing”, permanently in movement through small shifts in its form, eventually climaxing in a split: a piece of this thing breaks away from the amorphous mass, disappears (from the image), comes back and is reintegrated. What one perceives is a kind of living entity that – in anthropomorphic terms – desperately attempts, through permanent movement and change to achieve a “qualitative” change: namely, to allow a new, a different form of itself to become gestalt. This new, different form seems to have been achieved in the first division of the thing into two parts. But this is shown to be a deception. After the return of the separated part and its dissolution as a result of being reintegrated into the remaining something, nothing has changed – nothing in relation to the movement, nothing in relation to the changes, nothing in relation to / with the form. “Becoming” here marks time; movement leads to a processual standstill (a “raging standstill”, Paul Virilio), but not in the sense of György Ligeti’s *Atmosphères* (a structural event), but rather in the sense of a repetition, as a structure giving rise to itself. It is as if the forces of becoming, if they remain in the area of





“simple” matter, have now also entered a cul-de-sac – which was already the case for all other “separations” of the forces of becoming opening up the areas of the meta-physical (language, morality, work, social society) and opening these.

What remains is a becoming without transformation, a transition without occurrence, a difference that does not make a difference, an effort at forming that does not get beyond the negative form of the amorphous, a thing that – if one wants to be well disposed with Heidegger – at best, reaches the light as thing-essence [Dingwesen] and is preserved there.¹⁹

The epistemological sounding of the *conditio humana* and the *physis* in *PlaceLineLack* thus comes up against an “inner” limit. There is no possibility of going further. Unlike Vilém Flusser, who in his passage through the abstraction process of becoming-human/becoming ends by suggesting a cheerful work of regression to catch up with the stages of abstraction again from behind,²⁰ Stylianidou allows nothing of the kind: no “house of Being” of whatever kind is in sight for man, for people, for speaking, working people, those in need of company, those dependent on contrast through change. That we are able to experience and perceive this not-being-in-sight, this is what “art” is ultimately for; an art that recalls the task, after the necessary surmounting of the one (logical thought), the two (binary thought) and the three (dialectical thought) to think further – beyond the anthropological square (writing, image, body, time) to the *quintessence* that (remember Foucault/Deleuze’s “nomadic thought”) is no longer directed towards a house of being.

¹⁹ “The things have gone, gone away – where? What has been set up in their place? The things are as long gone and nonetheless they have never been *as things*. *As things* – their essence has never properly come to light and been preserved.” (Martin Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, vol. 79 of the GA, ed. by P. Jaeger, Frankfurt am Main 1994, lecture: “Das Ding”, pp. 5-23, here: p. 22f.)

²⁰ Vilém Flusser, *Vom Subjekt zum Projekt. Menschwerdung*, Frankfurt am Main 1998.

